

Title: Whose violence, whose security? Can violence reduction and security work for poor, excluded and vulnerable people?

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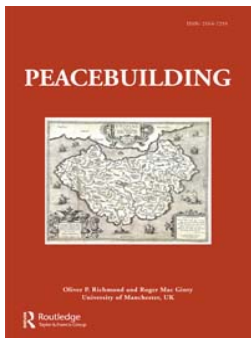
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Whose violence, whose security? Can violence reduction and security work for poor, excluded and vulnerable people?

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ABSTRACT

This paper probes behind the assumptions underpinning the violence reduction agendas of the UN and the World Bank: that all forms of violence are commensurate and fit neatly into causal models; that violence is ‘development in reverse’ and inseparable from state fragility; and that security is a self-evident public good. It presents a framework to classify global, state and non-state or local violences and the interactions amongst them. It suggests that the starting point for any evaluation of security as well as violence reduction should be the vernacular understandings and day-to-day experience of poor, excluded and vulnerable people, including those living at insurgent margins.

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Whosoever contracts with violence – and every politician does – must live with its specific consequences. Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*

1. Introduction

Sustainable development goal 16 (SDG 16) aims to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development’ and especially to ‘significantly reduce violence and related death rates everywhere’. Whilst conspicuously omitting all mention of security, in most other respects it echoes an established international consensus that peace and security, development and human freedom are indivisible.¹ SDG 16s capacious umbrellas conflates a diverse menu of policy objectives, including the rule of law and equal access to justice; reduction of corruption and of illicit financial and arms flows; effective, accountable and transparent institutions; responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making; access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms; and the strengthening of institutions and state capacity to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime. These differ little from the policy priorities spelt out in the World Bank’s influential 2011 Report

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¹United Nations, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report* (2005).

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on *Conflict, Security and Development*.² They stem from a shared worldview, in which liberal peace and the curbing of violence are seen as essential preconditions for sustainable development.³ This paper investigates behind this consensus to spell out the multiple ways violence presents itself and affects security and peace-building. It goes on to argue that violence is intimately connected to how states construct security and pursue development. Building durable and inclusive peace requires a different view of security, which is rooted in the experience and vernacular understandings of the people and groups who are ‘secured’.

2. Beyond linear models of violence and development

A number of assumptions about violence underpin the SDG16 consensus. First that all forms of violence are commensurate, such that it makes sense to say that ‘violence’ is on the increase or alternatively on the decline, globally and nationally. Second that it can be measured and fitted into causal models, on the one hand of its causes or determinants; and on the other hand of its developmental and other impacts. Third, that violence by its nature unsettles established political and social orders, and is thus inseparable from state failure or fragility and also from wider international insecurity. Fourth that violence is the polar opposite of security, just as war is the absence of peace. And fifth that violence and insecurity can be portrayed as ‘development in reverse’, or to put it the other way around security is an essential prerequisite of development.

All of these assumptions are open to question and debate. They tend to share in common lack of interest in the specific nature and dynamics of violence itself and its intricate relationships with political power, domination and inequality. There are many violences, which interconnect, yet have their own dynamics and relationships to development, which itself is far from linear and imposes costs as well as benefits upon poor and vulnerable people.

Recent analyses of violence have moved from a narrow focus on the causation of civil wars, on the motivations of rebels and on the impacts on aggregate indicators of economic performance. Instead they tell a more complex multicausal, multi-level story,⁴ identifying significant variations among different forms of violence,⁵ and analysing how multiple social actors engage in, are affected by and respond to these violences. In addition to civil wars, a provisional list would include:

- Globally and regionally networked violence, linked to transnational ideologies, including Islamist militancy (ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab).
- Transnationally networked criminal violence linked to commerce in drugs and other illicit or high value goods (Central America, West Africa, Afghanistan).
- One-sided state violence against citizens, especially dissenters and minorities (Chechnya, Zimbabwe, Syria).
- Violence arising in everyday encounters with formal law enforcers (military, police) and informal authorities (traditional leaders, urban bosses, drug lords).

²World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011).

³Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*, Routledge Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁴Christopher Cramer, *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing. Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries* (London: Hurst, 2006) deconstructs established accounts of civil war.

⁵Built into conflict data bases, like that of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), which has introduced new levels of complexity into the analysis of African conflicts.

- Violence subcontracted to paramilitaries, militias and mercenaries in unsecured borderlands (Sudan, Pakistan, Colombia).
- Natural resource violence linked to youth exclusion, rent-seeking and crime (Niger Delta, Sierra Leone, DRC, Colombia)
- Violence arising from ethnic cleansing, forced migration and human trafficking (Balkans, South-East Asia and the Mediterranean).
- Agrarian revolts and peasant uprisings (Nepal, Peru).
- Violence in urban spaces, linked to exclusion, lack of services, crime, failures of policing (Mumbai, Nairobi, Cape Town).
- Cycles of electoral and political violence (Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan).
- Vigilantism and other forms of community-based or religious enforcement.
- Rape, domestic violence and homophobic violence, linked to and reinforcing other exclusions.
- Structural or silent violence⁶ – including marginalisation of those who lack access to the means of violence.

Not all these forms of violence fit within accepted definitions of civil war or even violent conflict. Some are networked across national and regional boundaries. Many interconnect, as with the multiple links between gender-based violence and other forms of violence. Local-level vigilantism and other community mechanisms for policing behaviour and punishing transgressions can create an enabling environment for far wider political and intercommunal violence, as in the Central African Republic⁷ and North-East Nigeria. Conversely, protracted state repression may create the conditions in which armed revolt and civil war ultimately become more likely, as in Syria and Libya.

Yet, the list is so diverse that one may legitimately question whether all the violences it itemises belong within a single frame of analysis. One way of responding to this diversity is to narrow down to a specific category of violence, as with Kalyvas's magisterial analysis of violence in civil wars,⁸ which depicts the complexity and variation even within this major category of violent conflicts. Another, adopted here, is on the one hand to focus on the defining attributes of violence itself, and on the other hand to spell out variations in how these attributes take shape in different political economies, forms of violence production and moral narratives.

3. How violence works and for whom; seven propositions

Although much violence is profoundly political it cannot be reduced to 'politics by other means' as in Clausewitzian or realist accounts of warfare. Nor is it simply 'economics by other means', as with both Marxist and rational choice analyses of why men to take up arms. The point made in the quotation by Max Weber prefacing this article, is that violence is not just any other means, it has its own specific characteristics as a form of social action, which also entails its own particular ethical burdens. The key to understanding all forms of violence

⁶Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91; and Michael Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria: With a New Introduction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

⁷Louisa Lombard and Sylvain Batianga-Kinzi, 'Violence, Popular Punishment, and War in the Central African Republic', *African Affairs* 114, no. 454 (2015): 52–71.

⁸Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

is that they involve extreme harm or threats of harm. Terror is not confined to terrorism but is inherent in all violences. At the same time, as Arendt has pointed out, violence is not to be confused with power⁹; it often makes its appearance when power is weak and public authority is contested. It is just as often linked to state-breaking as to state-making. These propositions seem almost too obvious to state, yet they have significant implications for analysis of violence reduction and for building peace.

First because frameworks for thinking about and controlling violence are neither just analytical constructs nor just matters of policy. They are interwoven with moral narratives and cultural imaginings. Their discursive framings differ from one historical era and one society to another. For much of human history, violence has been tied up with conceptions of moral virtue as well as harm, honour as well as fear and outright terror, as in Homer's *Iliad*, certain Islamic conceptions of *jihad* or Fanonist glorification of anticolonial violence. Conversely peace is an ethical choice, situated within alternative conceptions of culture and historical understandings. In the modern world, the terms of moral evaluation appear to have shifted decisively against violence, or so influential liberal analyses like Pinker's *The Better Angels of our Nature* contend.¹⁰ Yet whether violence has actually diminished and by how much remains disputed.

Moreover, the theory and practice of security and of peacebuilding sits within the same discursive domain as that of war and violence. Peace is the apparent antithesis of war; peacebuilding aims to reverse cycles of violent conflict; and security offers protection from violence and the fear of violence. Both peace and security claim the ethical high ground in posing moral as well as practical alternatives to violence. Yet both remain intimately connected with violence.

The harm of violence is overwhelmingly physical: killing, maiming, bombing, eviscerating, beating, raping, torturing, displacement and so forth. It takes aim at bodies, identities and boundaries. Yet, the traumas are also psychological, cultural and symbolic. Its impacts on the moral economy of power, on the assertion of social hierarchies and on the course of social conflicts, depend as much if not more upon threats, fear and terror, as upon direct physical violence itself. It is often argued that 'structural' or 'silent' violence is as disempowering and constraining as direct physical violence; and that development harm makes poor and vulnerable people suffer as much as open violence.¹¹ To an extent this is so. But it misses the point that physical violence has its own dynamics, and adds its own particular contributions to the sum of human suffering.

Second, as Kalyvas argues, the social relations of violence prevailing in times of civil war differ fundamentally from those, which prevail in peacetime: 'War structures choices and selects actors in radically different ways than peace – even violent peace.'¹² This assertion has considerable traction and empirical support. Yet, this paper contends that civil war violence should be situated within a broader terrain of violences, including but not confined to civil wars. Moreover, although distinct, the social relations of violence mesh in complex ways with those in wider capitalist or political marketplaces, which themselves interpenetrate.¹³

⁹Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 35–56.

¹⁰Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2012).

¹¹Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research'; and Watts, *Silent Violence*.

¹²Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 22.

¹³On the crucial role of political marketplaces in mobilising people and resources for violence see Alex De Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa. Money, War and the Business of Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), chap. 2.

Better understanding is needed of how violence works and for whom, both generally and with respect to specific forms of violence. All forms of violence can be understood as the outcome of distinctive forms of social production which 'produce' and deliver violence (and the fear of violence) within particular violent spaces: be these armies, intelligence organizations, propagandists, militias, guerrillas, terrorists, warlord followings, mafias, gangs, terrorist organizations or mobs. Hoffman's analysis of West African 'War Machines', for instance, describes how male bodies are recruited from the reserve army of marginal urban youth 'for efficient deployment in the overlapping service of security and profit'¹⁴ in rebel fighting groups, local militias and security enterprises. Complex social assemblages conjoin those who command the means of violence with capital assets (weapons, logistics, communications, social and symbolic capital) and combatant labour forces or armed followings, and enable them to wage war, intimidate, plunder, dominate and protect. It is important to analyse how they extract resources, impose costs, spread benefits, control bodies, deploy terror, manipulate images, create networks of civilian support and compete amongst each other for people, territory and assets.

Third, violence is fraught with uncertainty and violent spaces are inherently volatile. Clausewitz talked of the fog of war, but the fog envelops all other forms of violence too. In times of conflict, the ability to create uncertainty for others tends to be an important source of strategic advantage and of political power. Furthermore, in the political theatres of conflict, few clear relationships exist between the resources invested in violence; levels of casualty and destruction; and political or economic outcomes. Military analysts refer to 'force multipliers': i.e. the social and political conditions which increase the effectiveness of armed violence. Force multipliers can, however, work in both directions, diminishing as well as increasing the credibility of violence and of those who use it. One of the major lessons of so-called asymmetric conflicts in places like Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan is that overwhelming force does not necessarily translate into military success, still less security and political stability.¹⁵ On the other hand, targeted acts of terror can spread ripples of fear far out of proportion to the casualties inflicted that spread insecurity, corrode the social fabric and undermine public authority, even in stable societies. The current moral panic surrounding 'Islamist' violence in Europe is a case in point.¹⁶

Fourth, and closely related to this uncertainty, are the intricate relationships between violence, power in both visible and invisible forms¹⁷ and social narratives and imaginaries: how violences are imagined, represented and communicated. The 'shock and awe' of great powers, acts of extreme violence by terrorists, rapes by ethnic militias or killings of activists by criminal mafias are all forms of communication, playing upon deeply embedded fears of violence. They acquire resonance from the multiple ways in which violence is reinterpreted in the streets, in political discourse, in popular culture and in the mass media. Acts of violence can be considered as speech acts and like all speech acts are open to confusion,

¹⁴Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2011), xii.

¹⁵Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla. Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2009).

¹⁶Fewer people are being killed or maimed by terrorist violence in Europe than in the 1970s and 1980s. There is incomparably much more carnage in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Nevertheless, terrorism is the lens through which all else is interpreted in the West.

¹⁷Highlighted by McGee in this special issue.

exaggeration and misunderstanding. Yet at the same time they have their own perverse logic, especially for those who deploy them to reinforce or challenge positions of power.

Fifth, are the inherent tensions between violent methods and the political and social ends they are meant to serve. Even well-planned humanitarian military interventions can go awry or have seriously perverse consequences, still more hasty and poorly conceived ones, as in Somalia, Iraq or Libya. Equally, small insurgent minorities (guerrillas, terrorists, etc.), which use violence for their own political goals can wreak enormous havoc without seriously advancing these goals, or end up instead as predators upon those they have come to liberate. Once embarked upon, violence tends to usher in fast-changing processes with their own laws of motion, which call forth competing or opposing violences in complex political and military marketplaces. Weber's warning is apt, because the use of violence cannot be justified solely by reference to its proclaimed aims, be these protecting security, building peace, ensuring social justice or seeking revolutionary transformation. Those who deploy violence for whatever cause have to take responsibility for the consequences, which may be a far cry from their original goals and include failing states, broken societies and appalling human misery.

Sixth, identities and with them boundaries, territorial and social, are bound up both with violence and with security or protection from violence. Identities are central to people's sense of selfhood, bodily integrity, well-being and safety. They provide grammatical constructions through which people imagine their social worlds, articulate their fears, demarcate their security and respond to and sometimes organise for violence.¹⁸ At the same time, identities are invoked by the powerful; they are written into the structures of nation states; they are markers for horizontal inequalities¹⁹; and they demarcate hierarchies of citizenship, sometimes violently enforced. In sum, identities form junction points at which state-centred and vernacular understandings of violence and security intersect and clash.

But rather than being in any simple sense a 'cause' of insecurity and violence in their own right, identities are fluid, socially constructed at multiple levels and open to manipulation, especially in conditions of rapid change and insecurity. They are the basis of modern nationalism and citizenship, as Anderson argues²⁰; yet are in deep tension with it. National citizenship is in principle inclusive in being constructed around equal rights and common security. But in practice citizenship can involve various forms of state-sanctioned exclusion: against migrants and refugees; against faith groups not subscribing to secular conceptions of citizenship; against minorities like Rohingya in Burma, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Hazara in Afghanistan, or Sunni Muslims in Iraq, who are seen as less deserving of the protection of the state than ethnic, linguistic or religious majorities.

Enloe has analysed how elites in colonial and post-colonial states have securitised ethnic and religious identities: to ensure the loyalty of security apparatuses; to define which groups can be trusted; and to demarcate those seen as security threats.²¹ Many authoritarian

¹⁸See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006); and Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divides Societies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980). Enloe analyses how security elites use 'ethnic state security cognitive maps' to determine which groups are security threats.

¹⁹Frances Stewart, ed., *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Graham K. Brown and Arnim Langer, 'Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: A Critical Review and Research Agenda', *Conflict, Security & Development* 10, no. 1 (2010): 27–55.

²⁰Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

²¹Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers* is as pertinent now as when published in 1980.

regimes hardwire exclusionary policies into the practice of the state itself. Latent identity conflicts remain suppressed until regimes fracture, bringing the fabric of public authority into question, as in ex-Yugoslavia, early 1990s Somalia or Libya. Yet exclusionary violence also occurs in democracies, like Sri Lanka, India and Northern Ireland, being especially oppressive in combination with majoritarian politics discounting the rights and aspirations of minorities.²² It can have active champions rooted deep in civil society, be they Buddhist monks, Islamic clerics, extreme nationalists or even militant secularists.

Seventh, violence, even subaltern or insurrectionary violence, often reinforces inequalities and is inherently antidemocratic. This may seem a sweeping claim, given that violence can tear down as well as prop up social hierarchies and non-democratic political orders. It is sometimes said that violence is ‘democratized’ when states lose monopolies of violence in situations of social chaos. Yet, this misleads in that power devolves to armed groups, which move into the political spaces opened up by these upheavals, as in Iraq and Syria. Even when force is used by armed groups with popular support, this is not at all the same as having a democratic mandate. What counts in the final analysis is that violence places power, rents and control over people in the hands of those controlling the means of violence, whoever they may be. Popularly based armed struggles frequently end up centralising power in commandist structures, which consolidate new forms of domination and resource control. At best they rewrite the rules of inequality and shift its burdens. Even peacebuilding reinforces new forms of disempowerment and exploitation if it shirks issues about who controls violence and for what purposes.

4. Violence, force and security: a frame for analysis

The analysis above suggests that although forms of violence differ, they share certain shared features, and can be placed within a common frame of analysis, spelt out in Table 1.

The Table distinguishes first among the spaces where violence occurs, as well as the social agents, including states, who initiate violence within those spaces. Does the violence play out in global and regional spaces, networking violence between and around states, as well as other transnational actors? Is the violence deployed in national security marketplaces by states and political authorities, which assert their monopolies of force so as to protect, or alternatively to oppress and exploit their citizens? Are the principle protagonists non-state actors: both those posing armed challenges to the state (rebels, militants, criminals etc.); and those providing the protections neglectful or repressive states are unable to deliver? Or is it primarily non-state armed groups and militarily mobilised citizens, who fight over land, resources or identities, or endeavour to protect themselves from the actual or feared violence of others? These categorizations are not mutually exclusive. Civil wars can encompass state-citizen, citizen-state and citizen-citizen violence all at the same time. In the modern world both state and non-state violence can be transnationally networked as well as nationally organised.

A second set of distinctions derives from the narratives used to justify the use of violence. Is there a ‘legitimate’ or morally defensible narrative, or is the narrative weak or self-serving, being used to justify power, revenge or rent extraction. In the real world, the boundaries

²²Robin Luckham, Anne Marie Goetz, and Mary Kaldor, ‘Democratic Institutions and Democratic Politics’ in *Can Democracy be Designed? The Politics of institutional Choice in Conflict-torn Societies*, ed. Sunil Bastian and Robin Luckham (London: Zed Books), 37–51.

Table 1. 'Legitimate' force and 'illegitimate' violence?

	Global and regional	State/citizen	Citizen/citizen	Citizen/state
<i>'Legitimate' – claiming the mantles of security, inclusion and justice</i>	<i>International security</i>	<i>National security</i>	<i>Security 'from below' and in the vernacular</i>	<i>Subaltern resistance and civil activism</i>
	Just war and legitimate defence	State protection of citizen security	Community self-defence and protection	Asymmetric peace as well as war
	Responsibility to protect	Law, policing and public order	Local justice and policing	Civil society activism
	Humanitarian intervention	'Security for development'	Hybrid or 'traditional' security provision	Resistance to occupation and violence
	Peace-enforcement and peace-building	Stabilization, counter-insurgency and counter-terror	Popular justice and vigilantism	Popular (e.g. peasant or class) revolts
				Peoples' or national liberation wars
<i>'Illegitimate' or unjust – driven by profit, power and exclusion</i>	<i>Hegemonic violence</i>	<i>State repression</i>	<i>Extractive and exclusionary violence</i>	<i>Insurrectionary violence</i>
	Power projection	Human rights violations	Vigilante violence	Riots, civil unrest, electoral violence
	Corporate and privatised security	State-imposed redistribution of land and resources	Violent appropriation of rents, land or resources	Asymmetric, irregular or guerrilla warfare
	Proxy, hybrid and covert warfare	Subcontracted paramilitary and militia violence	Gender-based violence	Violence against collaborators and class enemies
	Military support to repressive regimes	Armed occupations of insurgent margins	Identity-based (ethnic, religious, sectarian) violence	'Extremist' or jihadi violence
	Forcible appropriation of resources and strategic real estate	State terror and politicide	Violence buttressing social (e.g. caste or class) hierarchies	Terrorism and exemplary violence
	Internationally networked criminal and terrorist violence	Ethnic cleansing and genocide	Criminal and mafia violence Sectarian and genocidal massacres	

between legitimate force and non-legitimate violence are blurred and contested – although some forms of violence, like torture, rape or the deliberate targeting of civilians, are impossible to justify. Much also depends upon who lays claim to the mantle of legitimacy and from whom. Positionality is crucial, as both violence itself and protection from violence look very different when seen by states and powerful elites; and when experienced by citizens, especially those who are vulnerable to day-to-day exclusion and violence.

Whilst problematic, the distinction between legitimate and less legitimate violence is worth making. It makes a real difference whether or not violence fits a morally and politically defensible narrative: if there is a credible case that it maintains peace; supports a just cause; does not violate national and international law; upholds legitimate public authority; has the assent of citizens; and protects vulnerable people. None of this alters the fact that force is inseparable from political power, depends in the last resort upon lethal violence, and can easily escalate out of the control of those who use it. But this makes it all the more important to unpick the narratives, which justify its use. Are they defensible in principle? Are they observed in practice? How if at all are those using force accountable and to whom?

Of course the deployment of force itself blurs the boundaries still further, setting up distinct historical trajectories of change, which tend then to rearrange the moral compass by which the use of violence is guided and evaluated: as when humanitarian interventions become tarnished through imperial ventures and new cycles of violence; or when popularly supported rebellions morph into coercion and extraction by predatory armed entrepreneurs.

The categorizations of the Table not only provide a way of making sense of the multiple forms of violence. They also focus attention on the deep contradictions associated with all forms of violence. Powerful states act to preserve international security, build peace and support humanitarian objectives; but their efforts to do so are often compromised by hegemonic agendas and geopolitical interests. States claim to protect national security and preserve law and order, but these may become a cover for the repression and rent extraction by political elites. Multiple forms of extractive and exclusionary violence arise in divided and unequal societies; but vulnerable communities and groups can devise their own ways of protecting themselves from this violence. Subaltern violence often taps deep popular discontents arising from inequality and maldevelopment; but these discontents can instead be channelled into civic activism and popular resistance.

It was argued earlier that violence tends to be linked to immense asymmetries in power, wealth and the means of coercion. But the asymmetries can run in two directions – as when insurgents draw upon their greater operational agility, local knowledge and access to social media, so as to offset the superior firepower and resources of conventional security forces. Arguably there is also scope to build upon such asymmetries in order to resist violence and to build peace; and this will be returned to later in this paper.

5. Violence and development: wealth destruction or wealth creation?

The premise of SDG 16 is that violence is not only damaging in itself but is also damaging to development. However, the precise nature of the relationships between violence and the creative destruction we call development remains open to dispute. It depends on what kind of violence; on how it relates on the one hand to the creation of wealth and on the other hand to the destruction of wealth; and on how it redistributes assets poverty towards and away from insurgent margins. Violence is just as much part of the story of development as it is part of the story of underdevelopment. It can arise both when economic accumulation takes off; and when it fails.

Mainstream analyses of the development–conflict nexus²³ (summarised on the left-hand side of Table 2) for the most part adhere to neoliberal paradigms of market oriented development. People and groups who engage in violence do so as rational actors responding to material opportunities and incentives.²⁴ Development and material progress themselves are seen as the most powerful form of conflict prevention. State fragility is regarded as both a cause and an outcome of blocked development; and it is also viewed in its own right as a major source of political violence.

Conversely, security and public order are considered to be key prerequisites for development. Following from this, recent policy analysis has focused on stabilisation programmes

²³Major empirical analyses include Paul Collier, et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap. Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003); and Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug, *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁴Christopher Cramer, 'Homo Economicus Goes to War: Methodological Individualism, Rational Choice and the Political Economy of War', *World Development* 30, no. 11 (2002): 1845–64.

Table 2. The development–violence–security nexus: synergistic or contradictory?

Development as violence prevention	'A violence called development'
Conflict is development in reverse	Conflict interconnects with capital accumulation
Conflict destroys social capital	Conflict is a potential site of innovation
Violence is driven primarily by economic incentives	Violence is structural and linked to inequality
War economies distort formal economies	War can revitalise informal economies
The developmentisation of security	The securitisation of development
State fragility is a major source of insecurity and violent conflict	'Seeing like a state' is itself a source of maldevelopment, inequality and violence
National security and public order are preconditions for development	National security consolidates the grip of military, political and economic elites
Stabilisation and statebuilding	Subaltern resistance and unruly politics
Globalisation encourages both development and security	Globalisation has a backlash; including networked, asymmetric wars

aimed at re-imposing security and on political settlements to establish institutions and create durable forms of political order.²⁵ Stabilisation shares some common ground with counterinsurgency, including the use of development programmes to 'win hearts and minds', and thus chimes in implicitly with the security agendas of international bodies and global powers.

A more critical stream of analysis²⁶ (summarised on the right-hand side of Table 2) not only problematises security but also questions prevailing unilinear notions of market-oriented development. It sees violent conflict as inherent in the development enterprise itself, arising out of the accumulation strategies pursued by political and economic elites, together with their corporate allies and international backers. It entertains the possibility that violence can be harnessed to the creation as well as the destruction of wealth. It draws upon a somewhat different pool of research findings, including detailed ethnographies and historical studies, rather than the large-n cross-national statistical studies, which tend to be favoured by the mainstream. It harks back to earlier traditions of analysis on structural violence²⁷ by focusing on inequality, state violence and globalisation as major determinants of conflict. And it focuses less upon state fragility than upon the state itself, notably when its security policies are repressive; its development programmes are top-down and extractive; and its structures are unresponsive to the needs of citizens, especially the poor and marginalised.

These two paradigms of analysis are not necessarily mutually exclusive.²⁸ Those who see market-oriented development as an antidote to violent conflict, for instance, must also reckon with its potentially regressive impacts. Critics of the securitisation of development can also recognise the need for security policies that try to better understand and control for the developmental impacts of security interventions.

Even so the two paradigms imply differing approaches to research and to policy. The second in particular highlights the need for a long term historical perspective on how varying trajectories of development and of underdevelopment generate violence; which understands how different pathways to and from violence in turn reshape the pattern of

²⁵Sarah Collinson, Samir Elhawary, and Robert Muggah, 'States of Fragility: Stabilization and its Implications for Humanitarian Action', *Disasters* 34, no. 3 (2010): 275–96.

²⁶Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2008); Cramer, *Civil War Is Not a Stupid Thing*; Oliver P. Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding: Intervention, the State, and the Dynamics of Peace Formation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); and Watts, 'Economies of Violence.'

²⁷Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research'; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); and Watts, *Silent Violence*.

²⁸Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug, *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War* bridges both traditions of analysis in their statistical inquiry into civil wars.

development, as in Vietnam or Ethiopia, or usher in new cycles of underdevelopment, as in DRC or El Salvador. It suggests that policy should concentrate less upon security and violence-reduction as ends in themselves; and more upon tackling the inequalities in wealth and power that lie at the root of insecurity and violence. It recognises the pitfalls of relying upon compromised national elites or international actors to build peace, when they shoulder much of the responsibility for violence. And it emphasises the struggles and agency of those most exposed to poverty and violence, focused on later in this paper, both in putting pressure on decision-makers to respond to their concerns and in creating alternatives to violence in their own right.

6. The two faces of security – and of peace

Security, especially state security, tends to be enacted in contexts of the violently contested political authority. Often it is enacted *through* violent power, rebranded as legitimate force. Small wonder that some in the development community, including those who drafted SDG 16, hesitate to use the word at all. But although security is a deeply disputed idea, it is also a highly necessary one. Security functions simultaneously as an analytical construct, as a frame for policy and as a moral narrative. It is distinct from the equally ambiguous if less contentious concept of peace. Yet, at the same time, it is often seen as essential to the preservation of peace.

Most of the things that international decision-makers, political and security elites and development practitioners do in security's name are supposed to protect the safety and welfare of people in a world of multiple challenges and threats. However, there is a tendency to slide from global, to national, to citizen and to human security and back again, without enough serious reflection on how they interconnect and on where tensions and contradictions lie hidden. Development agencies have too often plunged into security policies and programmes, without a clear understanding of where they might lead, who would benefit and how they might go wrong.

The ambiguities stem in part from a deep-seated tension between two distinct visions of security (summarised in Table 3), which interconnect, yet are in deep tension with each other. On the one hand, security can be seen as a process of political and social ordering, aiming to reduce violence and keep the peace. As such it is territorially organised and kept in place globally as well as nationally through the authoritative discourses and practices of power, including socially sanctioned violence. It connects to conceptions of what Galtung termed 'negative peace': the ending of overt violence, without necessarily transforming the conditions giving rise to this violence or attending to the quality of the subsequent peace.

In this view security is a public good delivered in principle by states, much like official or donor-driven development.²⁹ Yet in a world where states and indeed the international order face sustained challenges, security is often kept in place also through alternative non-state or 'hybrid' networks of violence and protection.³⁰ Moreover, security is far from being

²⁹See the critiques of state-centred development in Scott, *Seeing like a State*; and James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

³⁰Volke Boege, M. Anne Brown, and Kevin P. Clements, 'Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States', *Peace Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 13–21; Roger Mac Ginty, 'Hybrid Peace: The Interaction Between Top-down and Bottom-up Peace', *Security Dialogue* 41, no. 4 (2010): 391–412; and Robin Luckham and Tom Kirk, 'Understanding Security in the Vernacular in Hybrid Political Contexts: A Critical Survey', *Conflict, Security & Development* 13, no. 3 (2013): 339–59.

Table 3. The two faces of security and peace: necessary but highly contested concepts.

'Seeing like a state' ^a	'Security in the vernacular' ^b
Security as political and social ordering maintained through authoritative discourses and practices of power	Security as an entitlement of human beings to protection from violence and other existential risks
'Negative peace'. Halting violence rather than changing the conditions giving rise to it	'Positive peace', conflict-transformation and peacebuilding from below
Political power, legitimate violence and public authority are of the essence, globally as well as nationally	Security intertwines with other entitlements, including freedom from hunger and disease, protection from environmental hazards, etc.
Security is territorially bounded within states, regions, urban spaces, local communities	Security is ontological and tied to the construction of identities and of imagined communities
Capable and accountable state and local institutions, notably security and justice institutions	Rights, legitimacy and consent are central; the state is the problem as much as the solution
'Seeing like a corporation' ^c ; stabilising existing distributions of power and prosperity	Addressing conditions creating insecurity, including bad governance and social exclusion
Inequality, including unequal security, is inherent	Social and political inclusion, in terms of gender, class, faiths and minorities
Both states and the international community have a 'responsibility to protect': but how and to whom are they accountable?	Who speaks security and to whom? The voices and agency of the poor, vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed
Collective action initiated by national and international elites	Security from below. Subaltern politics, social movements and civil society

^aScott, *Seeing like a State*.

^bNils Bubandt, 'Vernacular Security: The Politics of Feeling Safe in Global, National and Local Worlds', *Security Dialogue* 36, no. 3 (2005): 275–96; Lee Jarvis and Michael Lister, 'Vernacular Securities and Their Study: A Qualitative Analysis and Research Agenda', *International Relations* 27, no. 2 (2013): 158–79; and Luckham and Kirk, 'Understanding Security in the Vernacular in Hybrid Political Contexts.'

^cJames Ferguson, 'Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa', *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005): 377–82.

an unalloyed public good. In principle, it is equally shared and socially inclusive, even if in practice it is anything but, especially at the insurgent margins where insecurity is most acute. For in practice it protects socially embedded power, established property relations and social privilege – and reinforces global, national and local inequalities.

On the other hand, security can be seen (in the vernacular) as an entitlement of citizens and more widely human beings to social peace and protection from violence, abuses of rights and social injustice, along with other existential risks such as famine or disease. It connects to the idea of 'positive peace', including transformations in the social conditions giving rise to violence and deepening the relationships between states and their citizens.

The vernacular understandings, day-to-day experience, resilience and agency of the people and groups who are 'secured' and 'developed' are in this view the touchstone by which to evaluate security and violence reduction. Most people fall back upon their social identities – as women and men, members of families, clans, castes, ethnic groups, sects, religions and nationalities – to navigate their social worlds, to respond to insecurity and violence and (sometimes) to organise for violence. At the same time, these identities are written into the structures of power and inequality, being deployed to establish hierarchies of citizenship and patterns of exclusion. Ensuring that security is inclusive and not simply the security of particular groups or the property of the well-armed, powerful and wealthy, is fraught with difficulty and must be negotiated at multiple levels.

'Security in the vernacular' is the term used here rather than the interlinked but distinct concepts of 'human security' and of 'citizen security' popularised by the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank,³¹ which fit in the conceptual tool-boxes of development practitioners, humanitarian agencies and intervention forces. Both human and citizen security have come under criticism for ‘securitising’ development by framing poverty, exclusion and vulnerability through security lenses, and thus paving the way for military interventions in the affairs of fragile states.³² ‘Security in the vernacular’ paves the way for more precise and detailed empirical scrutiny of how security and plays out in particular local and national contexts. It highlights the experience and social agency of those who are ‘secured’. And it underscores the transformative potential of security as an entitlement, which can be actively claimed by those who challenge the deeply rooted legacies of insecurity, exclusion and injustice.

Both these faces of security have their underside, most obviously the first. ‘Seeing like a state’ even with the best of intentions can lead to the interests of citizens being sacrificed to an unbending vision of national security or of top-down development (as even in Nyerere’s Tanzania).³³ It is also open to abuse – for instance, to prop up authoritarian regimes; to advance the interests of predatory elites; to impose exclusionary economic and social policies; to justify state secrecy and surveillance of citizens; or to justify the hegemonies and military adventurism of major world powers. And it tends to be closely if complexly related to ‘seeing like a corporation’, most obviously in enclave economies, where privatised security arrangements in protected enclaves may indeed destabilise or weaken the state.³⁴

The deformations of security in the vernacular tend to be more hidden, but no less damaging – for instance, the submission of minorities and refugees to campaigns of exclusion and violence by populist majorities; forms of popular justice that violate the rights, dignity and safety of supposed perpetrators; or grass roots endorsement of ‘traditional’ or customary institutions, which perpetuate gender and other inequities. Moreover, local-level insecurities can persist or even worsen, when a state, like India or Brazil, is considered to be stable, or a region or locality is considered to be secure.

Neither face of security can be considered without the other. The relationship between them is utterly crucial. The capacity of states to protect their citizens is at the basis of the social contract.³⁵ That is, the rights and security of citizens and people are the bedrock of state and international security – or at least they should be. But these entitlements cannot be protected without some kind of social order, however achieved. And how and by whom social order is assured are both affairs of governance and vital concerns for everyone who lives under the leaky umbrella of political authority.

Political stability, durable institutions, the rule of law, and effective and accountable security apparatuses are not just desirable attributes of states but are also in many respects conditions of the security of people. However, they come at a price, not just in taxes, but also because of the need for constant vigilance to ensure that those charged with delivering

³¹On human security see Roland Paris, ‘Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?’, *International Security* 26, no. 6 (2001): 87–102; and Richard Jolly and Deepayan Basu Ray, ‘Human Security – National Perspectives and Global Agendas: Insights from National Human Development Reports’, *Journal of International Development* 19, no. 4 (2007): 457–72. The World Bank’s ‘World Development Report 2011’ refers to citizen rather than security. Although used almost interchangeably, human security and citizen security are not the same, as the barriers erected against refugees fleeing violence in Syria and elsewhere remind us.

³²Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*; and Watts, ‘Economies of Violence’.

³³Scott, *Seeing like a State*. Tanzania’s disastrous villagisation policy is one of Scott’s most telling examples.

³⁴Ferguson, ‘Seeing Like an Oil Company’ argues that corporate security in enclave economies is not only compatible with weak statehood, but contributes to it.

³⁵David K. Leonard, ‘Social Contracts, Networks and Security in Tropical Africa Conflict States: An Overview’, *IDS Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (2013): 1–14.

security do not ignore or still worse violate the entitlements of those they are supposed to protect.

In principle, the gap between security demand and security supply is mediated in the political marketplaces of democracy. But these political marketplaces are highly imperfect, even in the so-called advanced democracies, and democratic accountability hardly ever extends beyond national boundaries. International agencies and donors promote security sector reform programmes in post-conflict and transitional countries precisely in order to bring down their democratic deficits. Yet, this tends to be a task of Sisyphus where the currencies of power are patronage, corruption and outright violence,³⁶ which both suborn and bypass the state and its formal security institutions. Moreover, it is not as if donors themselves are in any way accountable to those they are supposed to be delivering from poverty and violence. The democratic deficits of donor agencies along with international institutions, global corporations, major powers, peacekeepers and international NGOs are vast, but seldom discussed.³⁷

7. The challenges of rethinking violence and security in the vernacular

It is not enough simply to assert that security should be turned on its head and looked at from the viewpoint of the people who are secured, including those beyond the vanishing point of officially delivered security?³⁸ How ordinary people themselves define, experience and try to ensure their own security must be foregrounded. The World Bank's study *Voices of the Poor* identifies personal safety and security as amongst the pressing concerns of poor people,³⁹ and argues that they themselves are the true experts in poverty.

'Security in the vernacular' emphasises that those who are vulnerable and insecure are not just social categories but people, groups and communities, who perceive, cope with and respond to violence in ways that differ, sometimes radically, not only from the dominant state security narratives, but sometimes also from universal conceptions of human and citizen security. In Egypt, the words *amn* and *amaan* are both used to denote security. The latter includes notions of personal safety, which extend beyond conventional definitions of security. A recent study by Tadros⁴⁰ found it was used to cover at least nine different forms of security, amongst them security from state retribution and violence; absence of identity-based exclusion and discrimination; freedom from sexual harassment; everyday safety from criminal and terrorist violence; and hopes for the future including improved relationships among the country's different faith communities. Absence of law and order, with the state described as '*al dawla mekhala'a*' ('disjointed like a piece of broken furniture') during recent upheavals, was a central fear expressed by many of those interviewed.

Security is a central concern even for those who see the state and its security and justice agencies as remote from day-to-day concerns, or who actively avoid them because they are

³⁶Alex De Waal, 'Mission without End? Peacekeeping in the African Political Marketplace', *International Affairs* 85, no. 1 (2009): 99–113.

³⁷Severine Autesserre, *Peaceland. Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³⁸Carolyn Nordstrom, 'Women, Economy, War', *International Review of the Red Cross* 92, no. 877 (2010): 161–76 argues that such vanishing points render many people (notably women) invisible and unrepresented.

³⁹Deepa Narayan et al., *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change* (Oxford: OUP/World Bank, 1996), 2.

⁴⁰Mariz Tadros, *Decrypting Copts' Perspectives on Communal Relations in Contemporary Egypt through Vernacular Politics (2013–2014)* (Brighton: IDS, 2015).

seen as an oppressive presence. This is well captured in the language used by marginalised women labourers and sex workers in South Kivu when they said “*hawatuoni sisi wafupi*”, that they (big men, powerful people), don’t “see” us short people (the impoverished marginalised populations).⁴¹

The security landscape of ‘short people’ tends to be inhabited not only by agents of state security, but also by powerful employers of their labour and many other actors. Some of these actors operate beyond the margins of state authority or indeed are violently opposed to it: warlords, religious militants, guerrillas, paramilitaries, mafias, vigilantes, traditional authorities, secret societies, community protection bodies and many others. Security along with justice and public authority is often negotiated outside the state rather than within it,⁴² and includes various forms of hybrid security provision in which state and non-state security providers interact and may be hard to tell apart.⁴³ This is the day-to-day reality, which great numbers of people have to live with, often at some cost to their own personal safety, rights and welfare.

Indeed, there is a veritable cacophony of vernaculars, strung together by shared threads of history and webs of identity. A major challenge for researchers and policy-makers alike is how to listen and respond to the many ways people navigate the terrains of violence and envision their own security.⁴⁴ They can draw upon a more extensive and diverse array of empirical research than was available two or three decades ago, ranging from investigations based upon participant observation and action research to quantitative time series analyses drawing on livelihood and household surveys detailing how violence affects everyday lives.⁴⁵ A range of in-depth ethnographies and local histories detail how particular groups navigate the terrains of war and peace. They include studies of child soldiers, urban youths, women combatants, ‘bush wives’ and camp-followers; of refugees, displaced people and marginalised communities; of residents in urban neighbourhoods coping with gangs, drug dealing and ethnic or religious violence; of rebels, irregulars and ex-combatants; of vigilantes and informal, non-state policing and justice bodies.⁴⁶

Making sense of these diverse streams of research poses multiple challenges. First, the difficulty of triangulating findings from studies, which take different methodological routes, are of varying rigour, and address different analytical and policy concerns.⁴⁷ Vernacular narratives are replete with their own biases, elisions and erasures. The many studies of

⁴¹Jocelyn T.D. Kelly, Aleandria King-Close, and Rachel Perks, ‘Resources and Resourcefulness: Roles, Opportunities and Risks for Women Working at Artisanal Mines in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo’, *Futures* 62 (2014): 95–105.

⁴²Tobias Hagmann and Didier Péclard, ‘Negotiating Statehood: Dynamics of Power and Domination in Africa’, *Development and Change* 41, no. 4 (2010): 539–62.

⁴³Niagale Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful, and Robin Luckham, ‘Hybrid Security Governance in Africa: Rethinking the Foundations of Security, Justice and Legitimate Public Authority’, *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–32; Kate Meagher, ‘The Strength of Weak States? Non-State Security Forces and Hybrid Governance in Africa’, *Development and Change* 43, no. 5 (2012): 1073–101 highlights the potentially violent and discriminatory aspects of non-state security provision.

⁴⁴Henrik Vigh, *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea Bissau* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); and Luckham and Kirk, ‘Understanding Security in the Vernacular in Hybrid Political Contexts’.

⁴⁵Particia Justino, Tilman Brück, and Philip Verwimp, eds., *A Micro-level Perspective on the Dynamics of Conflict, Violence and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) challenge the assumption that large-n quantitative research is not possible in conflict-affected or insecure environments.

⁴⁶Among the more notable are Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, (London: International African Institute and James Currey, 2008); Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1997); Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, *Conflict and Transformation in the Eastern DRC* (Gent: Academia Press, 2004); Vigh, *Navigating Terrains of War*; Chris Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women’s Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Hoffman, *The War Machines*.

⁴⁷As discussed in Rosemary McGee and Jenny Pearce, eds., ‘Violence, Social Action and Research’, *IDS Bulletin* 4, no. 3 (2009).

ex-combatants, rebels and other participants in violence provide insights into why (mostly) men rebel and how they can be demobilised. Yet, they privilege their viewpoint and may divert post-conflict funding from those who have not engaged in violence. The narratives of those most marginalised – for example, submerged minorities, victims of sexual violence, and women carers who have assumed the burdens of looking after the injured, sick, elderly and displaced – tend to be harder to trace, all the more when silenced by violence itself.

One must also reckon with the political and social biases of popular framings of security. Repressive national security policies or *mano dura* policing methods sometimes enjoy wide popular support, especially in conditions of political upheaval as in Egypt, or criminal violence as in parts of Latin America. Popular policing of religious morality and lifestyle, be it by Islamist *hisba* or charismatic churches, sometimes reinforce state-approved curbs on the rights of women and intolerance of ‘deviant’ sexuality. Popular prejudices and religious bigotry intertwine in assaults on the bodies, homes and livelihoods of minorities like the Yazidi in Iraq, Hazara in Afghanistan, or Rohingya in Myanmar. Deep-rooted conceptions of popular justice based on exemplary punishment of offenders can convert vigilantism into political violence when social order disintegrates, as in the Central African Republic.⁴⁸

Analyses of how ordinary people understand security need to uncover the ‘hidden transcripts’ of those facing poverty, exploitation and violence.⁴⁹ Often they have a better grasp of their own situation than is commonly supposed. A case in point is the sex workers and other women working in and around artisanal mines in South Kivu referred to earlier, who formed the Association of Free Women, which helped them to gain access to health care, to withstand financial shocks and to receive social support from their peers.⁵⁰ Some marginalised groups, such as disenfranchised urban and rural youths in Nigeria, have channelled energies into more explicitly ‘insurgent constructions’ (within ethnic militias, area boy associations, *Yandaba*, secret societies, cult groups and in a particularly violent form Boko Haram), which challenge yet may also reflect a corrupt public realm.⁵¹

Local knowledge is at the core of security in the vernacular. National and international policy-makers ignore it at their peril. Abramowitz has argued⁵² in regard to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa that deep local understanding is needed for many reasons: to improve baseline data, including counting of the dead; to draw on actionable local ideas, for example about burial methods; to tap local initiatives and capabilities; and to render visible the invisible power relations constraining or facilitating collective action to contain outbreaks. Similar reasoning applies to security and justice provision, where local ownership and community-led initiatives are prioritised, but tend to remain unimplemented in the absence of sound understanding of local contexts.

Yet by itself vernacular understanding is not enough. Whilst the dramas of insecurity and violence play out at grass roots, they are also shaped by hierarchies of power, by political marketplaces and by economic transactions extending far beyond the local level. However, there is a wide gap in our understanding of how local, national and global insecurities

⁴⁸Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi, ‘Violence, Popular Punishment, and War in the Central African Republic’.

⁴⁹James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁵⁰Kelly, King-Close, and Perks, ‘Resources and Resourcefulness’.

⁵¹Charles Gore and David Pratten, ‘The Politics of Plunder: The Rhetorics of Order and Disorder in Southern Nigeria’, *African Affairs* 102, no. 407 (2003): 211–40. On Boko Haram see Dowd and Drury in this special issue.

⁵²Sharon Abramowitz, ‘Ten Things Anthropologists Can Do to Fight the West African Ebola Epidemic’, 2015 <http://somatosphere.net/2014/09/ten-things-that-anthropologists-can-do-to-fight-the-west-african-ebola-epidemic.html>; and A. Wilkinson and M. Leach, ‘Briefing: Ebola-Myths, Realities, and Structural Violence’, *African Affairs* 114, no. 454 (2015): 136–48.

interconnect. Little of the research on the macro-level determinants of insecurity, such as natural resource dependence, poor governance, or the commerce in small arms and drugs, spells out their impacts on the lives of vulnerable people. Conversely, little of the micro-level research on how people are affected by and respond to insecurity traces the causal connections and lines of accountability back up to the national, still less regional and global levels.

In the gaps between these levels of explanation, it is easy for what Autesserre calls 'dangerous narratives' to flourish.⁵³ On the one hand, these include causal stories elevating some global determinants of violence, like conflicts over natural resources, over others, which may be more directly relevant in specific national and local circumstances. On the other hand, they incorporate narratives, which privilege the plight of particular sets of victims, for instance the victims of sexual violence, over the determinants of the violence from which all suffer. Her point is not that either of these narratives is wrong. Rather it is that they are prioritised by international analysts and practitioners without serious empirical interrogation of how they play out in particular national and local contexts and of who is most at risk.

Relatively few studies spell out the empirical connections between local and national sources of violence. Even fewer investigate local–global or local–national–global interconnections.⁵⁴ There is an apparent drought of participatory or ethnographic research linking insecurity in ordinary people's lives to the global shifts which shape it. However, a handful of studies link local histories of conflict and insecurity to their national and global historical settings. Chauveau and Richards, for instance, trace back divergent motivations of fighters in the civil wars in two specific regions in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone to varying trajectories of agrarian change during the colonial and post-colonial periods, which in one case involved reliance upon migrant labour and in the other case created an excluded agrarian underclass.⁵⁵

At the same time, those most at risk from poverty and everyday insecurity are often themselves well aware that their situation hangs on events and social forces far beyond their reach. Especially so in a world in which the new media extend far and wide: to the legendary 'Arab street'; to urban youths and social activists; to local elites and disaffected young people in small towns and remote villages; and also to the religious militants, armed insurgents and criminal elements exploiting the vulnerability of such groups.

Yet rarely do they have the information and analytical tools that would enable them to make sense of these remote determinants of their insecurities. Access to information and capacity to press for change is mediated by many gatekeepers, including national and local elites, intelligence and propaganda apparatuses, media outlets, the rumour mills of populist politicians, the sermons and pronouncements of clerics, imams and religious militants, the blogs and postings of social activists, as well as the political theatre of the advocates of terror and violence. Very few of these interlocutors can be relied upon; often they frame insecurity through biased lenses; and seldom are they in any way accountable.

⁵³Severine Autesserre, 'Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences', *African Affairs* 111, no. 443 (2012): 202–22.

⁵⁴Robin Luckham, 'Introduction: Transforming Security and Development in an Unequal World', *IDS Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (2009): 1–10; Jana Honke and Markus-Michael Muller, 'Governing (In)security in a Postcolonial World: Transnational Entanglements and the Worldliness of "Local" Practice', *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 5 (2012): 383–401.

⁵⁵Jean-Pierre Chauveau and Paul Richards, 'West African Insurgencies in Agrarian Perspective: Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone Compared', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 4 (2008): 515–52.

8. Conclusions: building peace in unequal societies

The thrust of the analysis above is that the forms of violence are multiple and their laws of motion complex. For this reason, turning SDG 16's goal of reducing violence into practical peacebuilding poses immense problems. The starting point should be the vernacular understandings of those most affected by violent conflict. They are by no means passive cyphers in the dramas of violence war, peace and security. Only by listening to them can the grip of dominant state and security-centred paradigms over analysis and policy be broken.

Yet, the vernacular understandings and agency of local people by themselves can only take us so far. Ensuring that they make a significant impact on peacebuilding is both an analytical and a political task. A multi-level approach is essential in order to track the causal trails from local-level conflicts and insecurities to their wider national, regional and global determinants. But at some point these causal trails tend to run out or to become over-determined by the multiplicity of explanatory factors at each level. It is notoriously difficult to shift register between different geographical and analytical scales. It does not help that there are so few empirical studies making the interconnections.

The best one can do meanwhile is to carry out rough and ready mental experiments as reality checks. For instance, what would need to change nationally and globally as well as locally to better protect women who service the needs of men in Congolese mining villages; or members of Somali-speaking communities caught between al-Shabaab militants and brutal counterinsurgency? How can members of local communities navigate their way through criminal and paramilitary violence, as in Buenaventura, Colombia, in such a way as to connect with national peacebuilding and break the links to the global markets, which fund the violence? What needs to change for humanitarian interventions under the banner of the 'responsibility to protect' to reinforce local security provision and protect vulnerable people in countries like Afghanistan or South Sudan, rather than making them even more insecure? Posing such questions, even when lacking the evidence to answer them, points up what still needs to be understood, as well as what still needs to be done.

Lessons can also be learned for peacebuilding from the ample yet problematic policy literature on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism strategies.⁵⁶ Whilst these strategies have not been a central concern of this paper, they draw upon two insights which are consistent with the analysis above and are pertinent to peacebuilding. First, neither insurgent nor counter-insurgent violence can succeed without the active or at the very least passive support of significant sections of the civilian population. Second, although state and non-state violence mutually interconnect, they are asymmetric. That is, they are constructed around different ways of deploying and mobilising people and resources for violence, in which those who command superior resources and firepower do not necessarily come out on top.

Peacebuilding too can pioneer asymmetric approaches, by moving beyond standard policy instruments of stabilization and state-building, so as to tap popular resistance to all forms of violence, including those perpetrated by the state.⁵⁷ Resisting violence is not the same as simply avoiding it, or as retreating from the social arenas in which it occurs. Such resistance can only work if based upon sound understanding of how violence is organised and used in the service of power down to the most local levels. The weapons of the weak

⁵⁶A sophisticated example by the co-author of US counterinsurgency doctrine is Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*.

⁵⁷See McGee in this special issue.

include not just the capacity to ignore, work around or resist demands made by the powerful. They require also active strategies to mobilise political alliances and social networks that can challenge both violence itself and the armed and powerful groups, which deploy it.

But even such an approach to peacebuilding poses issues of positionality. The question ‘whose peace?’ cannot be shirked. In principle, peacebuilding should be a positive sum game, which transforms security dilemmas in which one group’s cohesion and safety becomes another’s exclusion and insecurity. But precisely how and by what processes remains the issue in societies characterised by profound hierarchies of citizenship, in which identities are woven deep into existing structures of power and wealth and are hardened in the furnace of violence itself.

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